

Marguerite de Angeli
**THE DOOR
IN THE WALL**



YEARLING



ROBIN drew the coverlet close about his head and turned his face to the wall. He covered his ears and shut his eyes, for the sound of the bells was deafening. All the bells of London were ringing the hour of Nones. St. Mary le Bow was nearest, St. Swithin's was close by, and not far away stood great St. Paul's. There were half-a-dozen others within sound, each clamoring to be heard. It seemed to Robin as if they were all inside his head screaming to be let out. Tears of vexation started to his eyes, but he held them back, for he remembered that a brave and "gentil" knight does not cry.

Ever since he could remember, Robin had been told what was expected of him as son of his father. Like other sons of noble family, he would be sent away from his mother and father to live in the household of another knight, where he would learn all the ways of knighthood. He would learn how to be of service to his liege lord, how to be courteous and gentle, and, at the same time, strong of heart.

Robin thought of his father and how he had looked on that last day when he rode off to the Scottish wars at the head of the column. Now, remembering, Robin could almost feel the weight of his father's mailed glove on his shoulder as he said good-by. Then he had been straight and strong, standing there in the courtyard as the men rode forth.

"Farewell, my son," his father had said, "forget not to be brave. God knows when we shall meet again. Farewell."

He must not cry.

Robin thought of his mother and how she, too, had said farewell, the day after his tenth birthday. She had called him to her side in the solar where she sat weaving.

"Since your father left for the wars, it has been a comfort to have you near," she said, "but you are ten and no longer a child to be looked after by womenfolk. It is time now for you to leave me. John-the-Fletcher will come for you in a few days and will take you to Sir Peter de Lindsay, as we have arranged. There, too, you will be away from danger of the plague, which seems to be spreading. And now it is fitting that I obey the wish of the Queen to be her lady in waiting, for she is in need of my care. Today an escort will be sent for me and I shall go. Jon-the-Cook, Gregory, and Dame Ellen will serve you until John-the-Fletcher arrives. Farewell, my son. Be brave."

She had drawn Robin to her and had turned away so he would not see her tears.

Little did she know how much Robin would need her! For the very next day he had become ill and unable to move his legs. That had been more than a month ago.

He was cold. He wished Ellen would come to mend the fire.

The bells stopped ringing, and Robin heard the boys from the Brothers' School running and shouting along the street. He hoped that William or John, Thomas or Roger would come in to tell him the news, but when their voices grew faint, he knew they had gone on past.

How he wished he were with them. Even the tiresome lessons of singing and reading would be worth doing if only he could run down the street with the other boys.

But he could not run. He couldn't even get out of bed.

Because he was unable to see out of the wind hole (window) Robin had learned to guess at what was going on down in the street. He knew the sound of armor and knightly equipment, for the King's men passed that way going to and from the Tower or Westminster, to joust or tournament, to parade, or on business for the King. A horse was passing now, but Robin was sure it was not of that order. It was probably the shire reeve's horse, for above the slow clatter over the cobbles Robin could hear the grating of runners on a kind of sled the horse was dragging. From the odor that came through the window he could guess that Wat Hokester had been taken again for selling putrid fish in the market stall.

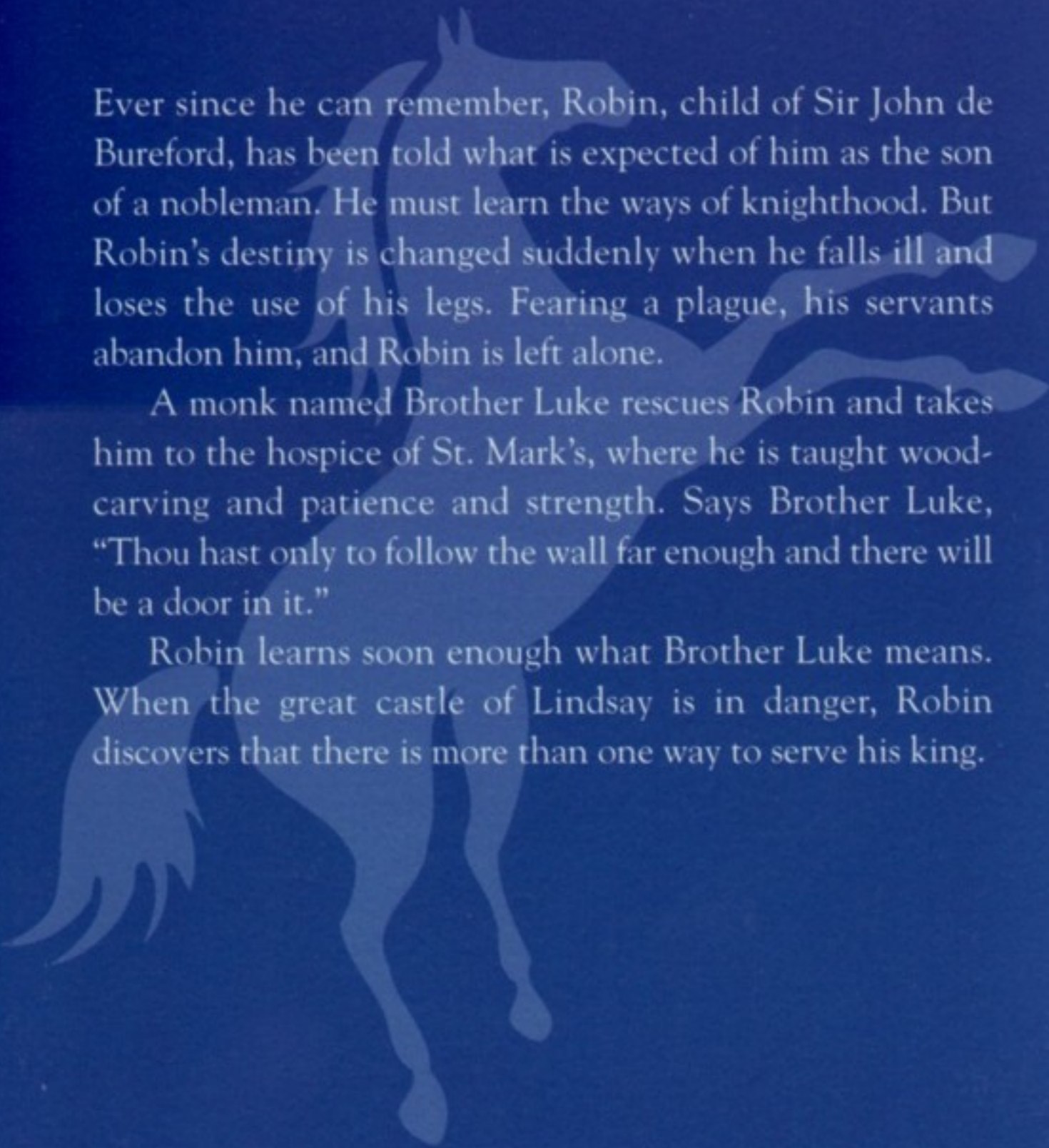
Robin chuckled. He knew that soon Wat would be standing in the stocks near the fish market with his evil-smelling goods hanging from his neck.

Now Robin heard the sound of Dame Ellen's feet shuffling along the passage to his wall chamber.

He turned his head to see what kind of dish she carried, but quickly looked away again when he saw that it was a bowl with steam rising from it. Was it barley soup? Was it a stew of rabbit? He didn't know and didn't care. The thought of it was all mixed with the sickening odor that came up with the raw wind from the street.

Ellen's skirt brushed the bed as she leaned toward Robin. She was near enough so he could hear the creak of her starched linen coif as she peered at him to see whether he was asleep. He shut his eyes so as not to see the great whiskered wart on her chin, and tried to close his ears to the sound of her Cockney speech. She saw by the squinching of his eyes that he was awake.

"Turn over, do, there's a good lad," she said, intend-



Ever since he can remember, Robin, child of Sir John de Bureford, has been told what is expected of him as the son of a nobleman. He must learn the ways of knighthood. But Robin's destiny is changed suddenly when he falls ill and loses the use of his legs. Fearing a plague, his servants abandon him, and Robin is left alone.

A monk named Brother Luke rescues Robin and takes him to the hospice of St. Mark's, where he is taught woodcarving and patience and strength. Says Brother Luke, "Thou hast only to follow the wall far enough and there will be a door in it."

Robin learns soon enough what Brother Luke means. When the great castle of Lindsay is in danger, Robin discovers that there is more than one way to serve his king.

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